

Designing Architectural Experiences: Exercises for Architecture Students

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Abstract

The way buildings appear to human beings, and the multiple phenomena they produce in the users: the effects, affects and actions inherent in our appreciation of architecture, are the main topics of this paper. In order to understand architectural experiences it is mandatory to consider multiple disciplines and approaches; physiology, cognitive sciences, semiotics, phenomenology, etc. The first objective here is to show a classification of architectural experiences depending on the way a human being focuses or directs his or her attention to certain qualities or elements of an architectural work. The second objective of this paper is to present exercises for first grade architecture students to develop skills in planning these different types of experiences architecture is able to produce. The mentioned classification of experiences is based on the PhD Thesis *Arquitectura: el diseño de una experiencia* (*Architecture: The Design of an Experience*), (de la Fuente, 2012), and it is as follows:

By *sensorial experience*, it is meant the experience in which a human being centers his or her attention to the stimulation being felt in the sensory receptors; "...the weather is sticky."

A *perceptual experience* is centered in the apprehension of external objects; it is therefore based on the mental processing of sensory data; "...the chiaroscuro allow us to see the cylinder shape."

In a *conceptional experience*, he who explores a building is interested in comprehending an architectural whole generated by or composed of distinct elements and interconnected spaces; "...this shape results from the intersection of two cubes."

An *interactive experience* relates to the manner in which buildings and our bodies are in contact or are mutually modified; "...it takes a lot of effort to climb that pyramid."

In an *associative experience*, the one who appreciates a building focuses on the interpretation of a signifying element on basis of his previous knowledge or habits; "...they look like old symbols."

An *emotional experience* focuses on the spontaneous valuation of situations that produce psychophysiological changes in a human being; "...I find that element highly impressive."

This classification is complementary to the more common taxonomy based on the sensory organs by which an experience is initiated (visual experience, olfactive, tactile, etc.). While the different types of experiences are exposed, it will be remarked that any architectural experience as a whole is composed of multiple phenomena. Experiential learning exercises will be proposed, through which the endless aesthetic possibilities present in architectural design will be explored and discovered by the students.

Keywords:

Architecture, perception, meaning, aesthetics, interaction, experiential learning.